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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000541

SIPDIS

STATE FOR D, P AND AF; NSC FOR SR ADVISER FRAZIER; BRUSSELS
FOR USEU; LONDON FOR GURNEY

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SUBJECT: REENERGIZING SADC AND SOUTH AFRICA ON ZIMBABWE

REF: PRETORIA 1338

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Joseph G. Sullivan for reasons
1.5 b/d

¶1. (C) We endorse the well-considered and timely proposal of Embassy Pretoria in reftel to make an urgent effort to reenergize SADC and South Africa on Zimbabwe. Such an effort, particularly if we can find a way to engage the EU, SADC and, most importantly, South Africa could help unlock an increasingly frozen political crisis based on ever increasing repression. While there is no assurance that Mugabe would respond positively to a US or regional initiative, a combined initiative would have greater prospects of success and the absence of African, and particularly South African involvement in the effort would give Mugabe all the excuse he would need to refuse compromise.

¶2. (C) Timing is urgent because Mugabe is proceeding apace to utilize violence, intimidation, ballot stuffing, and rigging of the electoral rules and media coverage to ensure that ZANU-PF wins an overwhelming majority in the March, 2005 parliamentary elections. The GOZ's withdrawal last month of an earlier request for UN assistance in organizing next year's elections was the giveaway to Mugabe's intentions to win through whatever means necessary and to renounce any pretense of engaging in dialogue with the opposition or utilizing the 2005 elections to address Zimbabwe's political crisis. The GOZ's violent conduct of this past weekend's by-election in the Harare suburb of Zengeza(septel) signal ZANU-PF's intention to use violence and intimidation and to ignore international (read Western) opinion/protests and the will of its own populace. While we think that MDC is unlikely to boycott even a rigged election, such an unfair contest will only ensure that Mugabe or a hand-picked successor, rubber-stamped through a constitutional amendment by the new parliament continues until 2008, prolonging for years Zimbabwe's multi-faceted crisis.

¶3. (C) Establishing a healthier environment for next year's elections will take time and considerable effort and should be a central priority for all with an interest in resolution of Zimbabwe's political crisis. The tepid response of SADC and other regional governments to our demarches on Zimbabwe underscores their sensitivity to taking on a "liberator" of Mugabe's stature. Framing the issue around the primacy of the election environment and SADC-Parliamentary Forum norms and standards may be a useful means of de-personalizing the issue and attracting SADC members on their own terms.

¶4. (C) With respect to Embassy Pretoria's specific proposals, we endorse the recommendation of sending an emissary to talk with President Mbeki and other African leaders, ZANU-PF and MDC officials to determine the status of the putative dialogue and steps needed to resolve Zimbabwe's political crisis. We do not expect the GOZ to welcome this initiative, but they would not be able to ignore renewed US engagement, and if we were able to engage President Mbeki and other African leaders in the effort, it would be much more powerful. Indeed, such an effort would depend for its force on Mbeki and other Africans telling Mugabe at the end of the day that he must agree to compromise. We also find the idea of a continuing contact group positive, believe the engagement of UNSYG Annan could be helpful along with perhaps another African leader. Nor would we object to discussing changes in US and EU sanctions with regional leaders, since these sanctions alone are unlikely to produce positive change, provided the quid pro quo of establishment of a free, fair and fully monitored election is fully agreed to by African interlocutors and then signed onto by the GOZ. Pretoria's final proposal for joint meetings with Zimbabwean parties aiming for a comprehensive agreement on elections, political change and economic recovery has merit, since a serious good faith dialogue among the Zimbabwean parties would be the best way to resolve the country's crisis, but is unlikely to happen without coordinated international pressure.

¶5. (C) Timing a US emissary's arrival for shortly after the South African election may be additionally propitious. ZANU-PF fears that a newly elected Mbeki might be more ready to press Mugabe harder. Moreover, ZANU-PF is going through its own internal turmoil, fueled by exposure of high-level corruption and Mugabe's obsession with his wife's infidelity.

On their own, Mugabe and ZANU-PF are likely to hang together, but a new international initiative could open new opportunities.

SULLIVAN